The World of Letters as Others See It

An English View of Ambassador Page's "Life."

I BEGAN this grand work one evening, continued it for the first thing the next morning, and read on without a pause for six hours. It is a book full of surprises and full of idealism, generous to a degree, but firm in its adherence to right through whatever might happen. Those who knew Mr. Page, however slightly, knew him to be an original and brilliant man, but even they were not prepared to find such extraordinary literary talent and such an aptitude for writing letters as appear in this record of the American Ambassador to this country during the war.—*By Claudius Clear in the British Weekly.*

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One Side of Sinclair Lewis.

MR. LEWIS'S greatest talent is mimicry. He is an amazingly brilliant mimic. He can take a train from New Haven to New York and reproduce in manner, voice and intonation a half dozen types on that train so that they are visibly recreated. The mimic is usually a caricaturist and a satirist, and Mr. Lewis is no exception to this rule. Caricature, by overemphasizing certain peculiarities, makes the picture more convincing, for such are the salient characteristics that separate the victim from other men. The satirist has little appreciation of the virtue of cooperation, of sinking one's interests in the endeavor to advance the general welfare. To him organized effort is ridiculous. So long as he has enough to eat he is an individualist.—*From "As I Like It." By William Lyons Phelps in Scribner's Magazine.*

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Murger: "King of Bohemia."

FOR some time he lived with the deserted wife of a swaggering bully who had made her life a purgatory. Often hungry, penniless, warmed only by the glow of their romance, they laughed at their enemy Time, Murger managing now and then to address enough envelopes to pay for a breakfast, or to sell a few stories to some obscure magazine. Then she left him for one of his more prosperous friends, and in abject misery, cold and hungry, he wandered for months in his first bitter disillusionment through the streets of Paris. It was thus that he was taken to the hospital, where he was often to return and where the dispassionate diagnosis of science was "insufficient nourishment." — *From "Henry Murger." By Alyn Gregory in the Art Review.*

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Boswell Introduces Himself.

"MONSIEUR, I am a gentleman of an old Scots family. You know my rank. I am 24 years old. You know my age. It is sixteen months since I left Great Britain, completely insular, knowing hardly a word of French. I have been in Holland and Germany, but not yet in France. You will therefore excuse my language. I am on my travels, and have a genuine desire to perfect myself. I have come here in the hope of seeing you. . . .

"I present myself, sir, as a man of unique merit, as a man with a sensitive heart, a spirit lively yet melancholy. Ah! if all I have suffered gives me no special merit in the eyes of M. Rousseau, why was I ever so created, and why did he ever write as he has done?"—*From Vagabond Impressions: Rousseau and Boswell." By St. John Lucas in Blackwoods.*

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Paul and Virginia.

SINCE the eighteenth century the idyl of "Paul and Virginia" has been bedewed by many Gallic tears, but Paul and Virginia, if they had married on a tropical island, could have lived on breadfruit and bananas. Paul would not have been expected to follow the conventionalities of life, and to wear a hunting suit on the day of St. Hubert, or to appear with his wife in the Bois very well dressed and brushed on fine Sundays. And Madame Paul would not have found it necessary to have a reception, with orange flower water and little cakes, once a week. Nor, when another little Virginia appeared, would the task of gathering together a sufficient dot for her possible marriage be upon their shoulders.—*From "The Foreign Point of View." By Maurice Francis Egan in the Century.*

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What Matters the Source?

WHO were the authors of those songs Burns made over into his masterpieces? Who were those dramatists and chroniclers whom Shakespeare rewrote? The names in many cases can be looked up, but they are of no account. The world feels that the great writer conferred a benefit by improving on the earlier work. What is far more important, the world also feels that the great writer, in improving on another man's work, actually invaded no private rights, for the material of literature is life, and life is no one's private property. After the invention of printing writers saw the possibility of financing dividends from their works, and plagarism is an aspect of this financial question, but it has otherwise nothing to do with art. The world in general continues to think of art in the old way, as creation rather than as business, and it quite properly cares little who does the creating, or who afterwards receives a money reward. What were Homer's annual earnings? Or was it really Homer? Or who besides David wrote his psalms? We know instinctively that these questions are trivial.—*From "Plagiarism and Originality." By John Erskine in the North American Review.*

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Chekhov's Origin and Early Life.

ANTON CHEKHOV'S grandfather was a serf, or slave, who purchased freedom from a nobleman for himself and family for 3,500 rubles, 700 rubles a soul, with one daughter, Alexandra, thrown in for good measure. His father was an unsuccessful grocer. Anton was born at Taganrog, a small seaport on a gulf of the Black Sea, Jan. 17, 1860. He had four brothers and one sister. While a boy he attended the local Greek school; and, although his father was unsuccessful as a merchant, his devotion to his family was praiseworthy. He taught them music, singing, violin and piano; in fact, trained them into a choir. Languages they learned from a French governess. The influence of the mother is shown by Chekhov's remark in his later years, "Our talents we got from our father, but our souls from our mother." In 1876 the family removed to Moscow, but Anton remained at Taganrog and went to high school, earning his own living and paying his own tuition. After three years he joined the family and entered the university. The father at this time was working away from home, and the young medical student found himself at the head of a family, every one of whom worked for their common living. It was during this period that he did his first writing, publishing in some of the local newspapers short sketches, mainly of a humorous character.—*From the Journal of the American Medical Association.*

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Honoring George Saintsbury.

ON October 28, at Bath, a deputation waited on Prof. Saintsbury (whose seventy-seventh birthday it was) on behalf of the committee which has been organizing a testimonial to him. Prof. Saintsbury was presented with an address and consented to sit to an eminent artist for his portrait. The signatories to the address—which has been finely written by Mr. Edward Johnston, perhaps our greatest living calligrapher—number several hundred. In part they represent Prof. Saintsbury's old pupils at Edinburgh, and in part the literary profession. Among them are Maurice Baring, Sir J. M. Barrie, Edmund Blunden, F. S. Boas, A. C. Bradley, Robert Bridges, G. K. Chesterton, Sir George Chrystal, Ian Colvin, Sir Henry Craik, Walter de la Mare, John Drinkwater, Oliver Elton, John Galsworthy, Sir I. Gollancz, Edmund Gosse, Prof. H. J. C. Grierson, Frederic Harrison, Prof. A. A. Jack, Rudyard Kipling, Prof. E. Legonis, Percy Lubbock, E. V. Lucas, Robert Lynd, the Right Hon. Ian Macpherson, J. M. Murry, Sir Henry Newbolt, Lord Phillimore, Sir Frederick Pollock, Sir Herbert Stephen, J. St. Loe Strachey, Lytton Strachey, Hugh Walpole and Sir Charles Whibley. We have seen the address nowhere printed in full; we feel, and we know that many of our readers feel so deeply in Prof. Saintsbury's debt that we may usefully give the text.—*From the London Mercury.*

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Shakespeare and Balzac.

PROSE is the language of what we call real life, and it is only in prose that an illusion of external reality can be given. Compare the whole process and existence of character in a play of Shakespeare and in a novel of Balzac. I choose Balzac among novelists because his mind is nearer to what is creative in the poet's mind than that of any novelist, and his method nearer to the method of the poet. Take King Lear and take Père Goriot. Goriot is a Lear at heart, and he suffers the same tortures and humiliations. But precisely where Lear grows up before the mind's eye into a vast cloud and shadowy mountain of trouble, Goriot grows downward into the earth and takes root there, wrapping the dust about all his fibers. Lear may exchange his crown for the fool's bauble, knowing nothing of it; but Goriot knows well enough the value of every banknote that his daughters rob him of. In that definiteness, that new power of "stationary" emotion in a firm and material way, lies one of the great opportunities of prose.—*From "On English and French Fiction." By Arthur Symons in Brooms.*

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A Refreshing German War Poem.

A POET not easy to place is Richard Dehmel—until his death in February, 1919, the most considerable German contemporary poet. Dehmel's greatest individual work is the so-called "Roman in Romanzen," or novel in verse sequence, "Zwei Menschen" (Man and Woman), the story of the passionate development of a man and woman, their striving after self-realization. Philosophically it may be too much "dated" to keep its freshness as a whole, but there are several passages of description in it which must rank very high in twentieth century German poetry, and on its technical prosodic side—consists of thirty-six poems of thirty-six irregular lines each—it is certainly not exaggerating to call it a masterpiece. Two posthumous works of Dehmel have appeared, a realist drama entitled "Die Menschenfreunde" (The Friends of Humanity) and a satirical allegory of the German Revolution, "Die Gotterfamilie" (The Family of the Gods). Neither is of much account beyond showing that Dehmel was no dramatist. What can be reckoned to his credit is the fact that he was one of those few German poets who wrote war poems and infused their work with dignity and imaginative sincerity, and one poem of his in particular, his "Lied an Alle" (Song to All), so refreshing to meet in an immense desert of jingoistic claptrap and sentimental rhetoric, will probably live.—*A. W. G. Randall in "Contemporary German Poets."*

Child's Story of American Literature

Continued from Page Thirteen.

he thought bad; about American greed for money and the great American habit of brag. Undoubtedly he was right in a good many ways, but persons who give themselves the pleasure of telling the whole truth as they see it are not likely to find themselves popular in the long run.

But it was when he went back to Cooperstown to live that he got himself into really hot water. There was a part of the property which Judge Cooper had left on the shores of Otsego Lake that was variously known as "Three Mile Point" or "Wild Rose Point" or "Myrtle Grove." It was a very beautiful spot, and Fenimore Cooper had made it the scene where Deerslayer and Chingachgook rescued Wah-ta-Wah. So long had the townspeople been free to use it for picnicking purposes that they had come to regard it as town property. One day, however, Cooper put up a sign warning them against trespassing, and then there was a pretty how-de-do.

Local wise men drew up fiery resolutions about what they called "the arrogant claims of one J. Fenimore Cooper" and denouncing "any man as sycophant who has or shall ask permission of James F. Cooper to visit the Point in question." The newspapers all over the State were soon busy with the case. Having no love for Cooper, they took the people's side. Whenever anything was printed that he did not like Cooper demanded that the newspapers take it back, and when they failed to do so he brought suits against them, and as he happened to be strictly right in his claim to ownership of the property he always won the suits. Thereupon the newspapers left the matter of "Three Mile Point" out of their columns, but found plenty of other points upon which to abuse him.

But Cooper was bound to have the last word, and in 1838 he published the two novels "Homeward Bound" and "Home as Found," in which he aired his troubles in the form of fiction. They told the story of a family who returned to America after a long stay abroad and found everything common and unclean, especially the newspapers. The "Three Mile Point" controversy was brought into the second story under its real name, and one of the characters was clearly Cooper himself. So there were more newspaper attacks and more suits, which Cooper, often pleading his own case against the best lawyers in the State, again won. Some of the most famous editors of the day, men like Thurlow Weed and Horace Greeley, having had their fun had to pay the piper. Six long years were spent in these lawsuits. Finally the battle was over and there were ten years of life left to Cooper. He did not waste them.

Even in the midst of his many law suits he had found time to write. In 1840 and 1841 he had completed the story of Natty Bumppo's long life with "The Pathfinder" and "The Deerslayer." Then "The Two Admirals" first appeared in *Graham's Magazine*, for which Cooper was engaged to write regularly in 1842. "Satanstoe," the first of his three anti-rent books appeared in 1845, and then its sequels, "The Chairbearer" and "The Redskins." And so on till the end, which came in September, 1851, for his pen was never idle. It is pleasant to recall that his countrymen came to think of him more kindly in the last years and that he himself grew a little weary of treading on toes. On his deathbed he begged his family not to aid in any way in furnishing material for a "life" to be written. He wished the old quarrels forgotten.

Although it is easy to poke fun at Cooper's "literary offenses," as Mark Twain did, and to point out his lack of humor and his overfondness for highsounding words, his great books, such as "The Spy" and the famous five dealing with "Long Rifle," will doubtless always be early chapters in the reading of American boys and girls. Europeans have thought more of him than have his own countrymen, even though he trod on European toes just as he shook his fist in the faces of the people of Cooperstown. The great French novelist Balzac declared that "if Cooper had succeeded in the painting of character to the same extent that he did in the painting of the phenomena of nature he would have uttered the last word of our art" and the Englishman Thackeray placed Leather Stocking, Uncas, Hardheart and Tom Coffin in the list of the characters of fiction that he loved best, saying, "They are quite the equals of Scott's men; perhaps Leather Stocking is better than any one in Scott's lot." La Longue Carabine is one of the great prize men of fiction. He ranks with your Uncle Toby, Sir Roger de Coverley, Falstaff—heroic figures, all American or British, and the artist has deserved well of his country who devised them."